

Family gives back to alma mater

Brothers and wives, all from Nanyang Poly, pay it forward by mentoring students

Ng Wei Kai

These days, opportunities come easy for Mr Joseph Zen Tay.

Since starting Elzeno Advisory, a digital media company, in 1999 at age 19, his businesses have grown from strength to strength, expanding into new fields along the way.

The 36-year-old has started two other digital and interactive media companies, and been involved in many professional collaborations and large-scale projects, such as one for Japanese manufacturer Olympus.

But things were hardly so smooth sailing for Mr Tay as a student.

The former Maris Stella High School student scored 24 points for his O levels, which meant he could not qualify for any course of his choice.

Still, he was given a chance to enter the digital media design course at Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) through the Special Admissions Programme, which admitted students based on their interest, talent and portfolio, and not just academic scores.

"NYP gave me, as somebody who is not academically inclined, a second chance to pursue what I love," said Mr Tay.

The programme is the predecessor to the current Early Admissions Exercise (see information box on the right).

Mr Tay has not forgotten his alma mater and still gives back to the school. While it is not uncommon for alumni to do so, what is unusual is that he is doing so together with his family.

He is one of five NYP graduates in his immediate family, including his wife, Ms Valencis Lo, 35, his brother, Mr Keith Tay, 33, and another brother Jed Tay, 27, along with his wife, Ms Ang Sheng Min, 24.

All of them graduated from the School of Interactive and Digital Media (SIDM) in NYP, and all except for Ms Ang had entered the poly through the Special Admissions Programme.

Now all of them are paying it forward by offering internships to NYP students and mentoring them.

"Going back and collaborating closely with NYP has been a very natural process for me. Being trained and taught at NYP's SIDM myself, and seeing my brothers graduate from the same school, I have confidence in the potential of the polytechnic," said Mr Jed Tay.

He runs Anomalyst Studio, a design-based post-production studio, with Ms Ang. He had started Anomalyst Studio as a second-year student in the NYP motion graphics and design diploma course.

The studio has taken on high-profile projects for events such as the National Day Parade and programmes at Resorts World Sentosa.

Mr Keith Tay is a senior design engineer at Armour Home Electronics in Britain.

In total, the Tays have, through their companies, taken on about 20 interns from NYP since 2004.

Some former interns have gone on to full-time positions in Anomalyst Studio after graduation.

Mr Joseph Tay, who runs Elzeno Advisory with his wife, also goes back to the polytechnic to teach as an adjunct lecturer, leveraging on his industry knowledge to advise his students.

"Being able to come back and offer the kind of help that I experienced as a student here is very rewarding," he said.

He traces his success to his days in NYP and the help he received from his lecturers. The lecturers had gone out of their way to guide students to the right person in the industry, even though these people might be the lecturers' future competitors, he added.

His wife, Ms Lo, who was from the Institute of Technical Education, vividly remembers the ethos of high standards and strong foundation at the polytechnic.



(From left) Mr Keith Tay and Mr Joseph Zen Tay and his wife Valencis Lo. Together, they and third brother Jed and his wife offer internships to NYP students and mentor them. Mr Joseph Tay, who runs Elzeno Advisory with his wife, also goes back to the polytechnic to teach as an adjunct lecturer, leveraging on his industry knowledge to advise his students. ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH



Mr Jed Tay and his wife, Ms Ang Sheng Min. Mr Tay had started Anomalyst Studio as a second-year student at Nanyang Poly. PHOTO: COURTESY OF JED TAY

VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN POLY

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MR JED TAY

"The lecturers focused on progressive learning and the fundamentals of research, which really help once you're out in the workforce," she said.

She said that if her son, Otiszo, five, is interested in design in future, "he must go to NYP".

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Aptitude-based poly admission

The Polytechnic Early Admissions Exercise (Poly EAE) is an aptitude-based admissions exercise that allows students to apply for and receive conditional offers for admission to polytechnics prior to receiving their final grades.

The exercise allows the polytechnics greater flexibility to select and admit students based on their aptitude and interests, apart from academic grades, allowing for a wider range of talents to be recognised.

The exercise is open to graduating O-level students and final-year Nitec and Higher Nitec students from the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

All five polytechnics are taking part in the exercise and can admit up to 15 per cent of their total polytechnic intake via the scheme.

The exercise started from last Thursday and ends on Wednesday for ITE students, and runs from June 22 to 28 for O-level students.